

**Testimony – Ohio House Health Committee  
February 4, 2020  
House Bill 436**

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of House Bill 436.

My name is Dean Fadel, I am dyslexic and my daughter was identified with dyslexia when she was in the second grade. It was upon her being reevaluated in the fourth grade that I discovered I was also dyslexic. I was 52 years old and dyslexia is hereditary. Many people will live their entire life not realizing they are dyslexic.

While I am going to share a little of my personal story with you, I want to make it very clear that I am not here today because I am angry with the exclusion, humiliation and anxiety my daughter experiences at her school because her learning style is different. I am grateful that I can afford the cost of tutoring and structured literacy learning from an Orton Gillingham certified teacher.

Today, I'd like to become a voice for the parents you won't see testifying in this committee. The parents who wanted to break the cycle of crime, poverty, drugs or alcohol and could not. I'm here for their children who also wanted to break that cycle but never had the tools.

My goal in appearing before you today is to make everyone an angry parent for the lost and forgotten people I will identify in this testimony.

According to research from Yale University dyslexia affects 20 percent of the population and represents 80 to 90 percent of those labeled with learning disabilities. Based upon a conservative estimate there are approximately 1.3 million Ohioans with dyslexia.

Upon learning of my dyslexia, it gave me a completely different perspective of my childhood education. In looking back I feel some bitterness towards several teachers and others who had given up on me, labeled me dumb or doomed; a failure.

I vividly remember seeing a video in the early to mid-1970s showing how people with dyslexia see letters backwards and syllables within words inverted. I can remember thinking; "oh my, I'm glad I don't have that!"

Through MRI scans on the brain we know much more today about how the brain processes reading. We know that dyslexia does not mean you see letters backwards.

MRI mapping of neural circuitry for reading shows the 'word form' area of the brain located in the back left side. Also discovered is an area in the front part of the brain that is responsible for articulating spoken words. As people read, good readers simultaneously activate the back of the brain and also, to some extent, the front part of the brain. Over time, reading becomes a subconscious activity.

Dyslexic readers, however, show an under-activation of neural pathways in the back of the brain. This causes initial trouble analyzing words and transforming letters into sounds.

One common way of compensating for reading challenges, which I had to figure out on my own, is to say the words under your breath as you read. This utilizes the front of the brain responsible for articulation of spoken words.

The findings provide evidence that people with dyslexia are not lazy, or stupid, but have an inborn brain difference that has nothing to do with intelligence. The dyslexic brain can and does learn to read – and science has developed tools that effectively help people with dyslexia break the code of reading.

Despite all of this knowledge and the development of effective teaching methods for people with dyslexia, 50 years later I have found myself re-living all the education related humiliation, exclusion, anxiety and depression through my daughter.

It's heartbreaking when your child comes home from school declaring they are stupid and a failure. It becomes infuriating when you consider how many other children are lost because it was never identified. Given our knowledge and the development of structured literacy teaching methods, it does not seem like there has been much progress in this area?

I also have a younger brother with Down syndrome. He was born in 1967, the same year the Ohio General Assembly adopted the legislation that created the locally funded county boards of developmental disabilities.

Today, there are 16 states that are similarly situated where programs for people with developmental disabilities are funded and run at the county level. Among all these states, almost two billion dollars is raised at the county level for programs for people with developmental disabilities. In Ohio, we raise more than all of the other 15 states combined. Ohio accounts for over one-billion dollars of that total.

Ohio is the envy of the rest of the nation with regard to how we are able to fund and operate our developmental disability programs in a manner that allows the unique dynamics of each county to be taken into account.

Unfortunately, our mother passed away when we were very young, but I can tell you that she would have never dreamed my brother could live as independently as he has. His first school was in the basement of a local church, and today he has his own apartment.

When looking at the developmental disability programs – individuals are served from the cradle to the grave. And the progress this state has made in serving this population is extraordinary. As members of the Ohio General Assembly you should take pride in how these programs have developed over the years. From a family perspective – thank you!

Dr. Sally Shaywitz, a professor of pediatrics at the Yale University School of Medicine and a leading authority on dyslexia said it best -- "With dyslexia, the problem is not a knowledge gap, but an action gap."

A comprehensive study conducted by the University of Texas in 1999 found that 78.8% of the total prison population in the state were either functionally illiterate (31%), read below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile (47.8%) or were likely dyslexic (41.5%).

Similarly, a 2014 study by the US Education Department found that about a third of incarcerated people surveyed at 98 prisons struggled to pick out basic information while reading simple texts.

A study by the Rand Corp. found that prisoners who participated in education programs were 43 percent less likely to commit crimes later on.

\*Studies have shown that learning disabilities have a clear link to youth delinquency, and are one of the most prevalent disabilities within juvenile court populations. \*\*One study estimates that between 28 and 43 percent of detained and incarcerated youthful offenders have an identified special education disability, a majority of these being learning disabilities.

On the other side of the spectrum consider that over 50% of NASA employees are dyslexic. They are deliberately sought after because they have superb problem-solving skills and excellent 3D and spatial awareness.

60% of self-made millionaires are dyslexic. A few famous people with dyslexia include Thomas Edison, Stephen Spielberg, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Whoopie Goldberg, Charles Schwab, and may God rest his soul, Kobe Bryant, who was very public with his dyslexia.

It appears that if you have dyslexia you either end up being really successful or you end up in jail.

I would like to respectfully suggest to you that House Bill 436 could be the most impactful legislation you will consider in your entire legislative career. I do believe that if this bill is enacted and effectively implemented, lives will be saved, and cycles of crime, poverty and drug and alcohol abuse can be broken.

According to the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development for every dollar you spend remediating a first grader, you will spend 4 dollars remediating a 4th grader. It is less expensive to identify and remediate early.

I've been advised by education professionals that it costs about \$3,500 for a teacher to become certified in structured literacy reading education, which is the best method to teach children with dyslexia. This is a one-time cost.

Consider that the average cost to incarcerate an inmate in an Ohio prison was \$26,365 per year in 2018, and our state's prison population ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation.

There are proven ways to teach people with dyslexia how to read that are not new or controversial. Research suggest that if all children were taught to read using approaches that work for students with dyslexia, reading and achievement would improve overall.

Any cost associated with House Bill 436 should be looked at as a no-risk investment that will pay a lucrative return to citizens of the state of Ohio.

House Bill 436 can help reduce crime and the state's prison population.

House Bill 436 can reduce the number of people needing public assistance.

House Bill 436 can help address a workforce shortage in many industries.

House Bill 436 can begin to break a cycle where parents are forced to send their kids to school hungry.

House Bill 436 can begin to improve the overall mental health of the state's population.

When it comes to dyslexia, the current education practice and public policy does not match the science and knowledge. The consequences are tragic for too many to let the status-quo continue.

House Bill 436 begins to address the action gap.

Just like in 1967, when the state stopped sending people with developmental disabilities to horrible prison-like institutions to rot and die, House Bill 436 will help to reduce the tragic consequences associated with the education discrimination of children with dyslexia.

My favorite quote on this subject 'allegedly' comes from Albert Einstein: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

I am not disabled and my daughter will tell you that she does not have a disability. We are not stupid. To say we have a learning disability because our brain operates differently is not right. It's like calling my brother with Down syndrome a "retard." Someone as unconditionally sweet and kind as he is brilliant.

Unfortunately for many who never had a chance in school - who right now are in prison, or abusing drugs and alcohol or committing crimes because they never had the chance to begin to learn – it may be too late.

But it's not too late to act for those children who represent the next opportunity to break the cycle.

House Bill 436 will begin to end the education discrimination against children who merely learn to read and write in a different manner. It will help treat all learners with more equality and inclusion.

Dyslexia reads - and succeeds.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.

\*Mallett, C. (2008). The disconnect between delinquent youths with mental health and special education disabilities and juvenile court outcomes.

\*\*Kvarfordt, C.L., Purcell, P., & Shannon, P. (2005). Youth with learning disabilities in the juvenile justice system: A training needs assessment of detention and court services personnel.